



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 3, 2023

Seth Bodnar
Office of the President
University of Montana
32 Campus Drive
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear Mr. Bodnar,

We write to urge your university and its affiliated schools to reject any study abroad program funding and other support from entities closely aligned with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As underscored by the work of the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the CCP, which one of us chairs, we are increasingly concerned by CCP-affiliated entities' malign influence campaigns and exploitation of academia. Neither Montana students nor your university should be unwitting partners in efforts that advance CCP objectives to the detriment of America's national security.

The University of Montana (UMT) Alexander Blewett III School of Law and its affiliated Max Baucus Institute (Baucus Institute) are promoting a summer 2024 study trip to China that is hosted and funded by the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF).¹ In the announcement on the UMT law school's Baucus Institute webpage, prospective recruits are informed that expenses are "Very few! Thanks to the generosity of CUSEF, nearly all expenses are covered, including lodging, travel insurance, breakfasts at hotels, and group meals."²

CUSEF is not a benign entity interested in the objective education of Montanans—it is an organ of the CCP's approach to influence operations, including those intended to shape Americans' views toward the CCP-controlled People's Republic of China (PRC) government.³ The organization operates within a broader strategy of united front work, whose purpose "...is to

¹ University of Montana. Alexander Blewett III School of Law, "China Summer Study Abroad," n.d., <https://www.umt.edu/law/baucus-institute/study-abroad/china.php>.

² *Id.*

³ Alex Joske, "The party speaks for you," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, June 9, 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you>.

control, mobilize, and otherwise make use of individuals outside the party to achieve [CCP] objectives.”⁴

CUSEF is guided by officials in the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a key united front forum designed to advance CCP objectives in and beyond the PRC.⁵ The founder and longtime chair of CUSEF, Tung Chee-hwa, was the vice chair of the CPPCC and clearly aligns with CCP interests. Since the 1980s, Tung served as a proxy for the CCP in Hong Kong, where as the first chief executive he pushed for the kind of draconian national security legislation we see today.

Concerns surrounding CUSEF’s presence in the United States are well documented. Under U.S. law, foreign entities undertaking activities in the United States related to the political or public interests, policies, or relations of a foreign government or a foreign political party are required to be transparent about their operations. Firms representing CUSEF have filed with the Department of Justice under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) on numerous occasions.⁶ In 2021, the now-Director of the Central Intelligence Agency William Burns agreed with a statement by Senate Select Committee on Intelligence leadership that “...Beijing uses nominally private civic organizations like the China-U.S. Exchange Foundation to sway public opinion and build influence.”⁷

Notably, other institutions of higher education that CUSEF has courted, including the University of Texas at Austin, have rejected accepting any funds from this CCP affiliate in prior years after learning of its nature.⁸ Heightened vigilance is warranted today across the country: the U.S. intelligence community’s unclassified assessment delivered to Congress this year notes that Beijing has ramped up efforts to build influence at the state and local levels.⁹

In the interest of protecting students and the integrity of UMT’s programs, we urge you to terminate any ties with CUSEF and commit to a rigorous vetting process for foreign partnerships going forward. Such a vetting process should exclude organizations like CUSEF that exist to

⁴ Peter Mattis, Testimony on “China’s Global Influence and Interference Activities” before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 23, 2023, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2023-03/Peter_Mattis_Testimony.pdf.

⁵ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “This Beijing-Linked Billionaire is Funding Policy Research at Washington’s Most Influential Institutions,” *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/28/this-beijing-linked-billionaire-is-funding-policy-research-at-washingtons-most-influential-institutions-china-dc/>; Peter Mattis, “The Center of Chinese Influence: the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference,” *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Eastbridge Books, 2020).

⁶ See, for example, a filing by BGR Government Affairs with the Department of Justice National Security Division FARA Registration Unit, March 1, 2019, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5430-Exhibit-AB-20190301-72.pdf>.

⁷ United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, “Additional Prehearing Questions for William J. Burns Upon his nomination to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, February 19, 2021, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/aphq-wburns-022421.pdf>.

⁸ Josh Rogin, “University Rejects Chinese Communist Party-linked influence efforts on campus,” *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/university-rejects-chinese-communist-party-linked-influence-efforts-on-campus/2018/01/14/c454b54e-f7de-11e7-beb6-c8d48830c54d_story.html.

⁹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, February 6, 2023, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2023-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

promote the CCP's narratives and interests—which have proven antithetical to academic freedom and free exchange—and to help the CCP identify foreigners who the party could exploit.

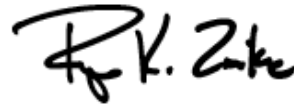
We are confident that your academic community can achieve the university's stated aim to make a lasting impact on the common good, including by contributing positively to our nation's understanding of the PRC and the CCP. We encourage you to ensure such efforts are not undermined by association with entities weaponized as a tool of the CCP.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Mike Gallagher
Chairman
House Select Committee on the CCP



Ryan Zinke
Member of Congress



Matt Rosendale
Member of Congress